

In the Name of the Father!



Kiran Shantaram relives memories of his legendary father, V. Shantaram, in his centenary year...

"Even at the early age of four, I was conscious of the fact that I was born into a great family...to a father who commanded respect. I was unaware of his stature as a great filmmaker, though.

"My immediate family comprised my father, mother Jayshree, and two younger sisters Rajashree and Tejashree, but I was also aware that Dad had married three times. My first mother Vimlabai is 91 years old, next is my biological mother who is 80 years old and the third is Sandhyaji who is 70 years old today.

"As a father, I found him to be extremely strict and disciplined although he possessed a soft corner for us. He was always involved with his work. He had this habit of eating his meals very quickly. So

my mother had put up a sign in Marathi on his table which read 'Eat slowly'. But it was in vain. When I once pointed it out to him, he said, 'Kiran, I don't have the time to glance at that signboard because I am constantly thinking of my films'.

"Being the only son, I was thoroughly pampered. However I wasn't spared my share of punishment either. I remember being extremely fussy about eating curd as a child. One day as usual, Mom was coaxing me to eat the curd but I pushed the bowl aside and it spilled right in front of Dad. He lost his cool and pulling me out of the chair he ordered me to wipe the curd with my hands. 'You don't value that food because you don't work hard for it. Look at the thousands of starving children who are deprived of it. Just because you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth, don't forget those who don't even have a spoon!' he hollered. This incident remained with me and I have never insulted my food since. Today when I see my three granddaughters relish their curd, I am reminded of my dad's words...

"At school too, there was no escaping his 'celebrity influence'. I was given maximum attention by my teachers and peers. This would puzzle me. Mom would explain that

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it was the Shantaram suffix to my name which carried weight. I fully realised this when I became an adult because along with the reflected glory, I also had to face comparisons with my illustrious father which was tough.

"After *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje* released, my father's affair with Sandhya delivered the final blow to his relationship with my mother—it ended in a divorce. We did not meet our father for eight years after that. We also faced the worst kind of poverty because there was no financial aid from him either. My mom began acting in outside films (earlier she would work only in my dad's films). Times were so difficult, each of us had to make do with just two chappatis at meal-time. Obviously, these things made me bitter towards my dad.

"Things changed after the freak accident father met with while shooting the climax bull-fight scene of *Do Aankhen Barah Haath*. Dad had become partially blind. When my mom learnt of this, she insisted that we kids visit him in the hospital. With a lot of apprehension, we reached the hospital. And before we knew it, he was holding us in his arms and weeping like a child. All the bitterness towards him vanished in that split second and we started crying too. Before leaving, he called me aside and said, 'Kiran, my Rajkamal studios needs you. Come and join me when you finish your studies'. It struck a chord in me and I did just that much to the dismay of my mother.

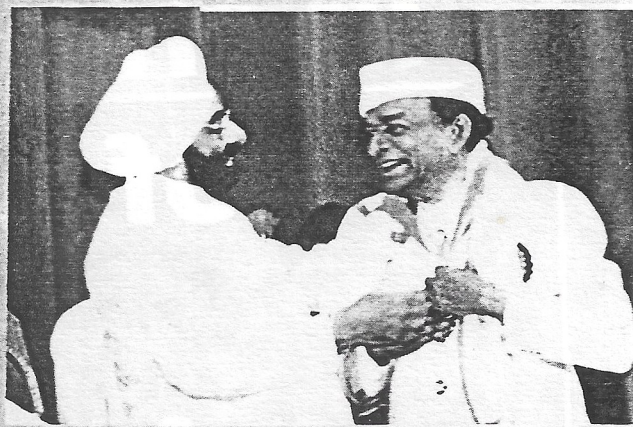
"I knew that my father had come up the hard way. He began with a job as a drainage sweeper with the Kolhapur Municipal Corporation on a salary of four annas. It took him 70 long years in Indian motion pictures to be called a legend. His illustrious career boasted 92 feature films as a producer, 55 films as a director and 20 films as an actor. He was also the first filmmaker to produce the first Marathi talkie. His was literally a trash to triumph story. I strongly felt that all his perseverance would go down the drain if I turned my back on him. I decided to join him.

"I joined my father as an assistant during *Navrang*. It was then that I discovered the true essence of V. Shantaram, the filmmaker. He was a perfectionist to the core. He would write the screenplay and the minutest details of each scene himself. Except for Raj Kapoor, I don't think any other director did that.

"He was also a thorough disciplinarian. However, it's just a fabricated story that he used a cane to extract good work from his artistes!

"Since he didn't smoke or drink himself, there was a

The lull before the storm - With second wife Jayshree and son Kiran.



Moment of glory - With the then president Giani Zail Singh receiving the Dadasaheb Phalke award.

prohibition on doing so on the Rajkamal premises. This practice is followed strictly even today. Once on the sets of *Duke*, Prithviraj Kapoor stealthily started smoking during lunch time. When Dad saw this, he went up to him and said 'You can only smoke after pack-up'. The senior Kapoor obeyed him instantly. A similar incident happened while Dilip Kumar was dubbing for *Ganga Jamuna* at Rajkamal. Dad firmly told him, 'Yusuf, if you cannot curb your smoking habit in Rajkamal, you can walk out and hire another studio'. Saying that to the reigning superstar then required a lot of guts, believe me!

"Dad's best friend in the industry was Raj Kapoor. They formed a mutual admiration society since he looked upon Dad as his guru while Dad considered him a genius. Their bond was so strong that even today there is a clause in the agreement of the Plaza theatre, Mumbai owned by us stating that the screening of outside films will be discontinued in the face of a V. Shantaram film or an R.K. film.

Raj Kapoor did the mixing of all his films at our studio. However he could not personally attend the mixing of *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* due to ill health. On his insistence, Dad took it upon himself to personally overlook the mixing supervised by Randhir Kapoor. When the final print of the film was out, Rajji came to Dad, took his blessing and then released it.

"Dad's discipline and dedication towards his profession can also be gauged by the fact that when Rajashree became busy with other assignments after *Stree* and *Geet Gaya Patharon Ne*, Dad promptly replaced her by Mumtaz for *Boond Jo Ban Gaye Moti* despite the fact that she was his daughter and had already shot for seven days for the film.

"He always made films with an underlying social message. That's the reason most of his films like *Navrang*, *Do Aankhen Barah Haath*, *Pinjara*, *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* and *Geet Gaya Patharon Ne* were widely appreciated by the classes and masses alike.

"Awards and honours always came his way. However the Dadasaheb Phalke award is definitely the high point of the recognition he achieved as a filmmaker.

"This is his centenary year. In his memory, we will give away the V. Shantaram awards instituted in 1992 to Indian films in various categories. We also plan to announce a film under the Rajkamal banner. The V. Shantaram legacy will flourish..."



Shameem I. Shah